



Childhood Connections

August 12, 2025

### Spotlight on Office of Childhood Teams!

Throughout 2025, this newsletter will spotlight team members who work in the Office of Childhood (OOC) and their “why” for supporting children, families, and the professionals who work directly with them.



Rachel Ratcliff is the Quality Initiatives Program Coordinator in Quality Programs. Her team oversees statewide programs that support quality child care experiences including the Quality Assurance Report (QAR), MO Supporting Early Childhood Administrators (MO-SECA), Infant Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Consultation, Early Head Start, Child Care Inclusion Services, and the Program Support Network (PSN). With 15 years of experience in early childhood, Rachel began her career as a classroom teacher before transitioning to DESE when the Office of Childhood was formed. Her “why” is to positively impact the lives of young children, families, and educators through access to the quality supports they need to thrive.

Amy Currence is the Professional Development Program Coordinator in Quality Programs. Her responsibilities include administration of the Missouri Professional Development System (MOPD) and coordinating the Conference on the Young Years. Additionally, she supervises a team of two who support early childhood professionals with the MOPD system. Amy joined DESE in 2022, after a 17-year break from State employment. During that time, she worked for a private not-for-profit agency that



supports individuals with developmental disabilities. Amy had previously worked for DSS and DHSS. Her “why” is driven by a passion to ensure early childhood professionals have the training and skills they need to ensure that children grow and thrive in safe, supportive environments.



Ashleigh Young is the Child Care Health Consultation Program Coordinator in Quality Programs. The purpose of the program is to enhance child care health, mental health, safety, and wellness practices for child care providers, children age newborn to kindergarten entry enrolled in child care, and their families. Ashleigh served as a classroom teacher beginning in 2018, and helped implement physical activity and nutrition initiatives in the district. Ashleigh has worked with the Child Care Health Consultation Program since 2023. As a former educator and mom, she is driven by the importance of ensuring that children grow and thrive in safe, supportive environments.

## UPDATES!

### UPDATE! Revision of Child Care Licensing Rules (Executive Order 25-15)

We want to thank the 992 respondents who took the time to participate in the Child Care Rule Revision survey for Executive Order 25-15.

The survey results will be posted soon. Feedback collected from the listening sessions and survey will be reflected in the report that OOC will submit to the Office of the Governor and to guide the rule revision process starting in the Fall of 2025.

Please visit the [Child Care Licensing Rule Revision webpage](#) to keep up to date with the work to revise the child care licensing rules.

### **UPDATE! 21st Century Community Learning Center Funds**

Thanks to everyone's outreach, the hold on the 21st Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) program has been released. As such, all of Missouri 21st CCLC grantees have been awarded continued funding for this 2025-26 school year.

If you would like additional information about afterschool programs, please visit the [Afterschool Programs webpage](#).

### **UPDATE! Memorandum of Understanding and Collaboration between DESE and Head Start**

We are pleased to release an updated [Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MOU) and Collaboration between DESE, the Missouri Head Start Collaboration Office (MHSCO), and the Missouri Head Start Association (MHSA). This MOU exemplifies an intentional collaboration between DESE programs that serve children with disabilities or delays and Head Start programs.

For more information on MOUs that may be helpful to early childhood programs, please visit the [Early Intervention Additional Resources webpage](#).

### **UPDATE! Federal Office of Special Education Programs Evaluation of Missouri's Part C Program - First Steps**

The Office of Childhood recently received notification that the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has completed its annual evaluation of Missouri's Early Intervention program. For more information, view the [message to stakeholders](#).

### **NEW!**

### **NEW! Child Care Background Checks FAQ**

A [Child Care Background Checks Frequently Asked Questions](#) (FAQ) resource was recently created to assist with understanding more about the child care background check requirements. This FAQ resource will help answer common questions about who is or is not required to have a comprehensive criminal background check, who qualifies as a child care staff member, eligibility determinations issued by OOC, and responses to general questions about processes and timeframes. More information is available on the [Child Care Background Check Process webpage](#).

### **NEW! Program Support Network**

The OOC is excited to announce the [Program Support Network](#) as a new quality initiative! This statewide initiative supports child care professionals in licensed and

license-exempt programs; for more information on eligibility and supports available to your program, visit the [Program Support Network webpage](#).

To locate support in your area, see the [Program Support Network Map](#).

### **NEW! 2025 First Steps Family Survey Results**

Each year, the OOC-Early Intervention section sends a survey to families who are participating in the Missouri First Steps program. Data from the survey are used for federal reporting and program improvement activities.

[Statewide results from the 2025](#) survey are now available online.

### **TRAINING!**

#### **TRAINING! Blindness and Low Vision Program for Educators**

Missouri State University has announced a renewed Blindness and low vision program for those interested in teaching the visually impaired. Beginning in fall 2025, current courses in the program will reflect new competencies in early intervention, CVI-multiple disabilities, transition, and the BRITE Act. The program is fully online with field experiences arranged in the candidate's local area.

[More information is available at Missouri State's webpage](#).

Please direct questions or comments to the program director, Dr. Chris Craig, at [ChrisCraig@missouristate.edu](mailto:ChrisCraig@missouristate.edu) or by calling 417-836-5215.

#### **TRAINING! ECHO Autism: Early Intervention**

Echo Autism: Early Intervention is offering a training focused on learning and sharing best practices for therapy services for young children on the autism spectrum.

**When** – 2nd and 4th Monday of the Month (September 22, 2025, through May 11, 2026)

**Time** – 2:45 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.

**Where** – All sessions are held virtually

For more information, view the [program webpage](#). [Register for ECHO Autism: Early Intervention](#).

If you have any questions, please contact [dickeyb@missouri.edu](mailto:dickeyb@missouri.edu).

#### **TRAINING! First Steps Online Module Training**

Are you or someone you know interested in learning more about the Missouri First Steps program? The First Steps Online Module Trainings are designed to provide general information about First Steps (Part C of IDEA) to a variety of audiences, including Service Coordinators, providers, higher education faculty, local education agency (LEA) personnel, and other stakeholders.

Create an account and register for a module.

To learn more, visit [DESE's First Steps online Module Training webpage](#).

## RESOURCE!

### RESOURCE! StrengtheningMOFamilies Animated Video Series

[StrengtheningMOFamilies](#) is an animated public education series offered by the Missouri Department of Mental Health to help Missouri's families understand important building blocks like resilience, caregiver-child connection, social-emotional learning, and more.

### RESOURCE! Understanding Developmental Milestones

Developmental milestones are a set of skills or age-specific tasks most children can do during a certain age range. Each child is unique and may reach milestones at a varying pace, so it is important to learn about these different stages of development. Parents may want to consult the child's doctor for any concerns.

When parents or caregivers, along with early care and education professionals, form partnerships, they assist each other through this important journey of development. Together they monitor a child's growth, celebrate accomplishments, and plan together for next steps in the child's future. [Early Connections](#) offers several resources for families and professionals to monitor a child's development.

## Monthly MOPD Quick Tip

Did you know there is a Missouri Professional Development (MOPD) system [Quick Start Guide](#)? Use this one-stop resource to share with new employees or staff in a new administrative role. It provides an overview of the most important steps and most common questions of the MOPD System. Find the Quick Start Guide under the [MOPD Instructions](#) tab where you will also find video and written instructions for each step of using the MOPD system.

## OOO TEAM HIGHLIGHT! Positive Team Feedback

We here at the OOC would like to highlight positive feedback received by **Robin Dalton, Benefit Program Technician**, in the **Child Care Subsidy Section**.

Robin assisted a parent with processing their subsidy application and received the following feedback: "I am so thankful I had the option to reach out to you guys with my concerns, I was assisted and made knowledgeable about the process of child care and how this all works. I am grateful for the help! Thank you so much."

Thank you Robin, and thank you to the rest of our Subsidy team helping families get the child care they need!



## Spotlight on Success

Spotlight on Success aims to share stories from local programs that are building community partnerships to strengthen and coordinate childhood programs.



The Jefferson City School District is excited to open a brand-new early childhood center, doubling enrollment opportunities from 150 to 300 students. The Jefferson City Early Childhood Center was made possible through the community support of a 2023 Kids FIRST Bond issue.

The old Early Childhood Center only accepted low-income and students with disabilities. Now, with expanded enrollment opportunities, the new center will be open to all children in district who are 4 or 5 years old at no cost to attend. The Center will provide a pre-kindergarten instructions for students prior to entering kindergarten.

With these new changes, the Center will also still provide Early childhood special education programs for children who meet federal and state guidelines for developmental delays or disabilities. Parents as teachers will also continue to use the early childhood center as a place to meet and support parents and children from prenatal through pre-kindergarten.

Jefferson City School District says about the new Early Childhood Center “We know that students exposed to preschool have a greater chance of academic success. They are more likely to attend college and to be employed later in life. Increasing the district’s early childhood enrollment will be a great benefit to our community, and we are thrilled to offer this opportunity to more families.” With a new center comes new facilities, including a 500-person storm shelter and multipurpose room, an outdoor playground, kitchen allowing direct-to-classroom service, and environmental themed rooms.

The grand opening ceremony was August 7, 2025. For more information, please see [the official news release](#).

## Archived Editions of Childhood Connections

[Visit the OOC webpage to find previous editions of Childhood Connections.](#)

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